

THE INDIA OFFICE RECORDS: A SOURCE FOR HISTORIANS OF PSYCHIATRY

Since human activities are endlessly diverse, it is not surprising that man has left the imprint of his presence in many ways and in all the corners of the world. And wherever man has been and in whatever pursuit he has been engaged he has enjoyed good health or endured bad. Hence the physician is held responsible for a detailed knowledge of human affairs, since a man could hardly be a guide if he did not know the highroads, the crossroads, and the byways.

What is true of general clinical medicine is true *a fortiori* of psychiatry: the psychiatrist attempts to know man both in health and in disease and to understand any conditions that may influence the transition from one to the other.

The disturbed states of body and mind that we wish to elucidate and also the concepts that we employ in our search for understanding have undergone change with time. Hence it is valuable to resort to the records of earlier periods in order to clarify our vision by means of temporal perspective. Such early records are sometimes revealed unexpectedly.

During a meeting of the Friends of the National Libraries held in London on June 19, 1969, the author of this note was presented to Miss Joan C. Lancaster, M.A., F.S.A., and to Mr. S. C. Sutton, C.B.E., who are respectively Deputy Keeper, and Librarian and Keeper, of the India Office Records. Miss Lancaster pointed out that the India Office, now situated at Orbit House in Blackfriars Road, London, contains among its volumes and files, which number more than 160,000, a valuable collection of psychiatric records. How were these obtained?

The early part of the story appears in an essay written by A. J. Farrington,¹ who states:

Before 1819 servants of the East India Company were detained in various institutions there. On July 30, 1818, however, the Company reached an agreement with Dr. Rees of Pembroke House, Hackney, for the transfer of private patients from India

1. Farrington, A. J.: Ealing Lunatic Asylum. *Local Historian* (Ealing Local History Society), 1965, Part I, pp. 15-17.

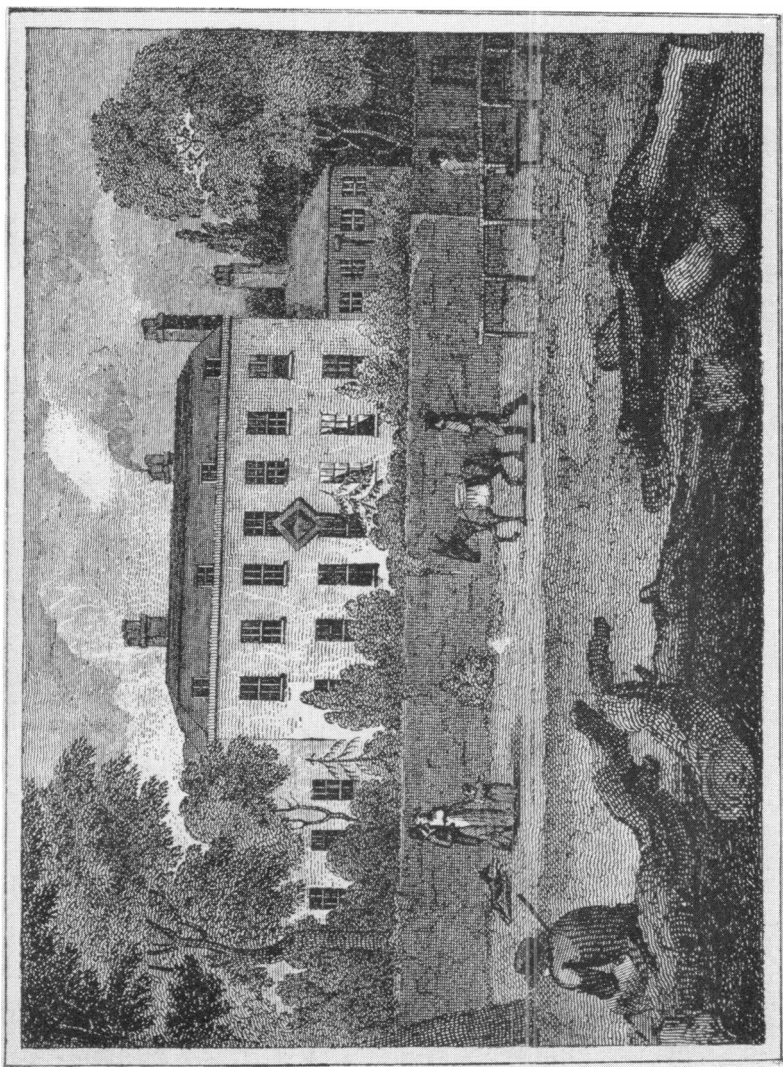


Fig. 1. Elm Grove. From Edith Jackson, *Annals of Ealing*, London, Phillimore and Co., 1898, p. 214. Courtesy of Central Library, Walpole Park, Ealing.

to his private asylum. Charges were fixed at £100 p.a. for 1st class patients (officers and senior civil servants) and £40 p.a. for 2nd class patients (soldiers, sailors, and minor civil servants). . . .

Farrington goes on to state that in 1870 this arrangement was felt to be unsatisfactory, and on March 25, 1870, the India Company acquired the Elm Grove estate of Mrs. Spencer Perceval (see Figures 1 and 2). The house with its fixtures and 38 acres of land were bought for £24,500. On August 25, 1870, the building was opened as an asylum. On June 24, 1892, after more than two decades of service, Ealing Asylum was closed and the building was demolished. It usually housed 156 patients, classified as follows: 1st class, 23; 2d class, 110; females, 23.

Additional information is found in an essay by Messrs. H. Holt and F. Toufar,² who state that the building at Elm Grove was used as an asylum not only by company personnel but also by their wives and children. The superintendent was a Dr. Christie. After his death in 1892 the patients were removed; the males went to the Royal Naval Hospital at Yarmouth, the females to an institution at Stafford. At this time the extant records were transferred to the India Office Military Department.

The records of Pembroke House and of the asylum at Ealing have been mentioned briefly in several published lists,³ which are being deposited in the Library of The New York Academy of Medicine. Also to be deposited in the Library is a detailed typewritten list furnished in photocopy through the kindness of Mr. H. Holt and Mr. N. E. Binns of the Central Library at Walpole Park, Ealing. This statement mentions medical certificates (1830-1889); registers of admission; case books (1846-1892); medical visitation books; registers of discharges, deaths, and removals; correspondence; and numerous financial accounts.

It is obvious that a careful study of the case records supplemented by examination of financial records and correspondence would provide valuable insight into mental disease which occurred among Englishmen in the Orient during a great part of the 19th century, especially with respect to causative and conditioning circumstances. The diligent inquirer will delve profitably.⁴

S. J.

2. Holt, H. and Toufar, F.: *Elm Grove*. Ealing, Oct. 1962. 5 pp. Mimeographed, 8 × 6 in. Through the kindness of Mr. Holt a copy is being deposited in the library of The New York Academy of Medicine. A copy examined at the Ealing Public Library contains additional notes in manuscript.

3. Foster, William: *A Guide to the India Office Records, 1600-1858*. London, H. M. Stationery Office, 1966 (reprint of edition of 1919), p. 120. Sutton, S. C.: *A Guide to the India Office Library*. London, H. M. Stationery Office, 1967, p. 75. Lancaster, Joan C.: *India Office Records. Archivum* 15:293-302, 1969 (for 1965); see esp. p. 296.

4. The author acknowledges with thanks assistance graciously given by Miss Joan Lancaster, Mr. S. C. Sutton, Mr. H. Holt, Mr. N. E. Binns, Mr. N. Scoales, and Mrs. Richard North.